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MANDATORY OVERTIME FOR NURSES PLACES PATIENTS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

Reps. Stark, LaTourette Call for Swift Passage of Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Reps. Pete Stark (D-CA) and Steven LaTourette (R-OH) introduced “The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act.” The bill aims to improve patient care and working conditions of nurses by strictly limiting the use of mandatory overtime for nurses. It is supported by all the major organizations representing nurses including: the American Nurses Association, AFL-CIO, AFSCME, AFT, SEIU, AFGE, UAW, UFCW and UAN. Senator Kennedy (D-MA) introduced the companion legislation in the Senate.

“Forcing nurses to work overtime is a dangerous practice that is simultaneously endangering patients and driving nurses out of their profession,” said Rep. Stark. “Analysis by the Institute of Medicine and other studies document the fact that forced nurse overtime needs to be severely limited to protect patient care. That’s exactly what our bill does.”

“We don’t let truckers drive when they’re dead tired and we shouldn’t force nurses to work when they’re exhausted,” LaTourette said. “Nurses should be able to work overtime if they want, and they should be able to turn it down if they are mentally and physically exhausted and fear they could jeopardize patient safety.”

The Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act would strictly limit the use of mandatory overtime for nurses to situations in which an official state of emergency is declared by federal, state or a local government. It would, however, allow nurses to voluntarily work overtime when they feel they can continue to provide safe, quality care. These limits would be part of Medicare’s provider agreements. The bill would not apply to nursing homes since there are alternative staffing and quality measures moving forward for those facilities.

The legislation would provide HHS with new tools to enforce these standards. It would also protect nurses from discrimination by employers who continue to force them into working hours beyond what they believe safe for quality care.

“Patients deserve quality care with a well-rested nurse—but that’s just not possible when nurses are forced to work hours on end in back-to-back shifts,” said Diane Sosne, RN, co-chair of the SEIU Nurse Alliance. “Now, more than ever, it’s time to protect patients by passing federal legislation that bans the unsafe practice of mandatory overtime in our nation’s hospitals.”

“Rep. LaTourette and I are working together on this bill because protecting patient safety is not a partisan issue,” said Rep. Stark. “A growing body of evidence attests to the dangers of forcing nurses to work overtime. We must not wait any longer. It is time for Congress to unite to protect patient safety. A simple, effective step in that direction would be passage of the Safe Nursing and Patient Care Act.”